

WEST HARTFORD SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMISSION

Minutes

March 17, 2015

Members present: Linda Hanson, Ray Guenter, Robert Kennedy, Ruth Kurien, Connie Melo
Ellen Phillips, Donna Sterling, and Philip Walker
Council Liaison: Shari Cantor
Staff present: Susan Huleatt, Kathleen Faroni, Gina Marino
Guests: Senator Beth Bye, Shawn Lang, Chris Sesta, Armena Walsh
Volunteer Secretaries: Linda Hanson and Amy Lynn Silverman

Chairman Philip Walker called the meeting to order for 10AM.

The Minutes of February 17, 2015 were approved unanimously.

Chairman Philip Walker introduced two guests: Shawn Lang, an AIDS activist and policy worker on the state and federal levels for LGBT issues and rights; and Chris Sesta, activist with “Women After Hours.” The women, who represent the LGBT community spoke about LGBT seniors and struggles trying to access services. Shawn and Chris work to educate, to raise awareness and to make change. They spoke about a number of challenges: how to create welcoming spaces and provide information for an increasingly aging population, and for persons living with AIDS and nearing retirement and for those needing appropriate housing. While Connecticut was the third state to pass a gay rights bill, homophobia is still present. Now dialogue needs to open about sexual health of older adults. Seniors are afraid of revealing themselves and experience a lack of support. Showing the Rainbow Flag on materials and providing training sessions in senior centers, retirement communities and nursing homes are good starts. It is important for the Town Council to demonstrate how it deals with LBTG issues – for example, in non-discrimination in contracts. Inclusivity may come in “baby steps.”

Senator Beth Bye

Senator Bye is now chairing the Appropriations Committee. Agencies and the public are responding to the Governor’s budget. There is an \$800 million cut proposed. Human Service discretionary dollars are in jeopardy. While *The CT Homecare Program* has been successful getting 1% added last year, it will be closed to new people if the budget holds. Nursing homes have staffing issues. Medicaid is the largest part of the budget – 15%. Renter’s Rebate is slated to be closed to *new applicants*. The Department of Developmental Services that works with seniors who have adult disabled children has impending large cuts. There is now a 65 member Development Disabilities Caucus in the legislature – the first in the nation. There are severe cuts to mental health care. West Hartford had been shortchanged by 30 to 40 million in the underfunding of education dollars, - getting only 31% what should be coming.

Senator Bye also spoke about streamlining reporting – there is a bill to change how agencies are penalized for an error. On the agenda is the Aid in Dying bill – “compassionate choices.” The budget has a spending cap and revenue is a problem. Perhaps cutting sales tax but broadening it could be of help. Criminal Justice reform is proposed with the 2nd Chance Society. Fewer people are incarcerated and crime is down 3%.

Town Council

Shari Cantor reported that the 3.5% tax increase for the budget is in discussion now. Education is seeking a 1.84% increase. There is pressure on the unions to pay more for health, etc. 87% of the budget comes from taxes and 85% of this is from residential taxes.

Chairman's' Report

No Report

Transportation

No report

Senior Job Bank

Report attached

Human Services

No report

Senior Centers

The reports are attached.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:04PM.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21, at 10:00am with representatives from FastTrack.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Lynn Silverman
Volunteer Secretary